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- To provide an exchange with the international professional graphological community.

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*Patricia Siegel*

**ABSTRACT:** In the handwritings of Florence, Ed, and Mara we see three faces of suffering, and how an inability to cope can lead to suicide. Through nine years of handwriting samples and a poignant doodle, we understand Florence's conflicting emotions, the corrosive effects of a symbiotic relationship with her older sister, her silent suffering, and her struggle to survive. Ed's and Mara's troubled lives and dispositions are very different from Florence's and from each other's. Yet, they share an imbalance that makes each one's attempt to compensate too great an effort.

Florence is the mother of three. She has a cheerful, efficient manner which camouflages an inner life both more difficult and more enriched than one would readily imagine. Through handwriting and drawing samples spanning a nine-year period, we will see the conflicting emotional currents in Florence as she tries to keep her equilibrium and lead a normal life.

As the result of a progressively deteriorating relationship with her older sister, Florence's controls were stripped away, giving free rein to emotions kept in check for many years. Florence's story and its graphic projection will enlighten us about attachment and hidden suffering spurred by long-standing emotional abuse.

We will also discuss Ed and Mara, whose lives and dispositions are very different from Florence's, and from each other's. Through their handwritings we can recognize three different faces of suffering. Yet, they each share an imbalance in their emotional lives that makes coping a great effort.

## FLORENCE AND SOPHIE

Florence's story comes from her daughter. It is this daughter's voice, much of it in her exact words, which allows us to empathize with Florence so completely. And it is the handwritings of both Florence and her sister Sophie that bring their personalities and relationship into focus.

Florence was the youngest of four children. Her mother committed suicide by drowning herself when Florence was just six years old. After her mother's death, Florence's father leaned heavily on the oldest daughter, Sophie, to run the family. Sophie, only 11 or 12 years old at the time, assumed the position of "mother," taking control over the other children.

Their father remarried when Sophie was about 15, and a year later Sophie left high school to marry a man ten years her senior. Even while married, Sophie

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\* This lecture was originally given at the Second International Graphology Conference, The Hague, Netherlands, September 20, 1996.



continued to act as Florence's mother. Florence wanted to go to college, but Sophie and their father decided against it. Florence was bitter about this decision all her life.

Then Sophie broke up a relationship Florence had with a young lawyer and arranged a match, instead, between Florence and her husband's younger brother. They married and Sophie continued to hold the reins. Florence's husband sacrificed so that Sophie's husband could go to law school. Sophie's husband, in turn, set up Florence's husband in a stationery business.

Sophie's husband went on to become a judge. He and Sophie lived in a large, beautiful home, always with a nanny for their children. Florence and her husband lived frugally with their children in a smaller house in a lesser neighborhood. While Florence had a simple life, Sophie was going to Europe and indulging herself with expensive clothes and jewelry. Anything special that Florence had was a gift from Sophie.

Sophie's husband was respected in their community, but in private he was too weak to cope with Sophie's domination. He began to drink too much and became irresponsible with money. While Florence and her husband saved what little they had, Sophie's husband borrowed from his brother to cover expenses. Over the years, almost \$70,000 was borrowed and never returned. Everyone knew about this but Sophie, and Florence, even in her most bitter moments, never revealed it to her.

Sophie was a daily part of Florence's life, calling every morning. Florence was captive to these calls. She squirmed and made faces, but she could not cut Sophie off. Sophie stirred up all sorts of family friction and controlled Florence's other relationships as well. Florence was expected to feel about people precisely as Sophie felt.

Florence could not oppose Sophie for her own benefit, but she did stand up to her for her children's sake. A fight with Sophie could give Florence a migraine headache lasting days. They might not speak for weeks unless Florence called and begged to be taken back into favor. If Sophie didn't approve of what Florence did, Sophie wouldn't talk to her, and Florence could not tolerate it.

The only part of Florence's social life untouched by Sophie involved a group of friends Florence played bridge with for over twenty years. Florence also kept diaries about her relationship with her sister and wrote poems and essays. The subjects, such as "Fortitude" and "Looking for the Best in People," revealed her attempts to be strong.

Despite her troubles with her sister, Florence was, for the most part, cheerful and productive. In her home she was a fine musician and a magnificent cook and seamstress. She did have rigid ideas about health matters, including insisting on everyone eating six oranges a day and getting lots of outdoor exercise.

Florence's family was not very aware of her mood swings because, on the surface, Florence seemed happy. She was a giggler, sang a lot, and loved to whistle. She also had the gift of empathy and a great compassion for the underdog, except for herself.

Before going on with Florence's story, let us look at her handwriting at age 45 (Figure 1). At a superficial glance it appears to flow rather smoothly, but a closer analysis reveals graphic clusters which point toward emotional disturbance.

Florence's overall pen pressure is only moderately light, but it is unevenly



Well, Dad, Joyce and I are  
anticipating a very pleasant trip to  
Providence on June 1<sup>st</sup> to witness Betty's  
graduation on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. How I do wish  
you could be there! It will be one of  
the very few vacations taken by Dad.  
But the occasion truly demands it.

There isn't much news from these  
parts just now. Still, the days pass  
much too quickly for me - meaning I don't  
get all the things accomplished that  
I would like. Help is very difficult  
to obtain, so between running to  
New Rochelle in the morning and performing  
household tasks in the afternoon, and  
always sewing something for Joyce in the  
evening, the days pass in rapid succession.

Do you suppose you'll receive  
a furlough in August?

If you manage to find any free  
time, I hope you'll write again, for  
I do enjoy your letters so much. It  
gives me a picture (after a fashion) of  
Air Cadets.

Sincerely

—

Figure 1a: Florence's handwriting, age 45,  
right-handed, red ink fountain pen. (Original reduced to 80%)



New Rochelle in the morning and performing household tasks in the afternoon, and always sewing something for Joyce in the evening, the days pass in rapid succession.

Do you suppose you'll receive a furlough in August?

If you manage to find any free time, I hope you'll write again, for I do enjoy your letters so much. It gives me a picture (after a fashion) of Air Cadelets.

Sincerely

Flo

Figure 1b: Florence's handwriting, age 45, original size.

applied, with retraced words and frequent breaks between letters. These characteristics, when considered as part of the expressive whole, reflect her inhibitions, anxiety, and ambivalence. They are countered by the enthusiasm evidenced by her upward alignment. Inconsistent pressure and a tendency to dwell on detail highlight her hypersensitivity and tendency to fixate on problems. Florence seems unable to proceed without self-consciously stopping to correct herself as she self-critically strives to meet expectations and gain approval. There is warmth expressed in many softly formed garlands, but her lower-zone letters are weak and inconsistently executed. Many are awkwardly elongated or sharply divided. This break in rhythm and continuity in the lower zone reflects Florence's poor integration and her unconscious frustration and resentment. (Note, too, the weakly executed word "Help" located in the center of the page.)

Still, Florence's ambition and drive is evident in her reach, both above and espe-



cially below the modest-sized middle zone. Although most of her letter forms are conventional, her accent on style emphasizes her need for creative expression. But the overall movement retreats to the left, as with the curled-in terminal strokes, instead of proceeding rightward toward the future. There is a glaring contradiction between her inhibitions and the lure of her dreams as she strives for recognition in the face of anxiety.

Her signature, unlike the rest of her handwriting, is undefined. It reveals the

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 Louis Michaels Hollywood AREA CODE 2-8916  
 750 Harrison St - Hollywood  
 Miami Shores Cab PLS AREA CODE 6014  
 759-4545  
~~Paul Mayer & Bea~~  
 84-58169 AT 84-58169  
~~Jamarcia L.J.~~  
 24 The Gothic AREA

Figure 2: Sophie's handwriting, age 52.



immediately called M. to  
 repeat and call her to task  
 for same. It is true I had told  
 her she could repeat same,  
 but I certainly didn't mean  
 in the manner in which she  
 alone can repeat and I am  
 hurt <sup>not</sup> only because I should  
 have kept my mouth shut,  
 but also, because she much  
 has hurt that poor defenceless  
 old lady. God forgive her,  
 and me, who this time was  
 mostly at fault for not  
 thinking carefully and never  
always rule and telling <sup>anything</sup>  
 to A. BE CAREFUL WHEN  
 TALKING TO SA

Figure 3: Florence's handwriting, age 52.



conflict between her inner feelings and the image she presents. But her signature also shows greater individuality and continuity than the text writing and attests to her creative aspirations. This is a woman who tries with much effort to improve her self-esteem and find fulfillment, while keeping her anxieties at bay.

Sophie's handwriting (Figure 2) is crude, undisciplined and irregular. It projects the difficulties she too had growing up, for she was also a victim of her mother's suicide and had to compensate for her loss. Whereas Florence's letter forms are predominantly rounded and overtly accommodating, Sophie's forms tend to be more angular and assertive, expressive of a defensive effort to protect her vulnerable core and sustain her image. Sophie's word endings are abrupt, depicting her stubborn resistance and undeveloped sensibilities. Her stroke quality — tense and erratic, often tremulous with frequent breaks in line flow — reflects Sophie's anxieties and her own struggle for survival.

A diary entry by Florence (Figure 3) at age 52 describes an upsetting experience involving Sophie. The graphic expression is much more emotional than those we saw at age 45. The writing changes significantly as Florence proceeds down the page. Her usual discipline begins to break down and is particularly evident in a greater release, an increasing upward alignment, and displaced pressure in the underlinings and "t" bars. At the end, Florence prints for emphasis, but its agitated, child-like awkwardness gives the impression that she is retreating into her childhood emotions. It is as if the child's rage in Florence is experienced again as an adult.

Figures 4 and 5 are Florence's log entries written several months before a last argument between her and Sophie. In the midst of this fight, Florence offered to give back every gift Sophie had given her since her marriage. It was Florence's way of breaking her tie to Sophie. To Florence's shock, Sophie actually did take everything back — linen, flatware and jewelry. For Florence, that was the complete rejection. It was also her breaking point.

Florence went into a terrible depression. A week later, Florence talked about killing herself. Her whole personality changed — her voice, her walk, her usual positive manner. The second week she seemed to pull herself out of the depression and acted pretty much as usual, but sat by the phone waiting for Sophie to call. The third week she went back into the terrible depression. Her family frantically sought out a psychiatrist.

Florence talked about Sophie compulsively. She tried everything to help herself when she had a good day, including double the fresh orange juice. She wanted to call Sophie and beg to be forgiven, but her family urged against it, for she had done nothing wrong.

One afternoon, Florence called her daughter to tell her that Sophie was with her, and they were going to patch everything up. Florence would let Sophie keep all her things, and they would forget the fight. The daughter went over and told Sophie off, but good. After Sophie left, Florence's daughter hugged her. Florence then flung a self-help book she was reading across the room and sobbed "How can you touch me?"



these talks hold no interest, for no one sees the end as yet.

When I heard of delinquent youth crime, etc, I blame it on the war. With death imminent as the young boys sent to Korea must feel, is it not natural a feeling of restlessness and recklessness would result? Emotions such as these lead the young to disaster.

Figure 4: Florence's handwriting, age 54.



July 23, 1952.  
Strange as it may seem, these talks  
still continue in much the same vein.  
Daily satisfactory meetings between the  
Korean Communists and U.S. In this feud  
continuing deliberately until after the  
election, do some contend? So the war  
"necessary to prosperity" as some contend?  
If so, do men find human life less important  
than money, and if so, how tragic!!

Figure 5: Florence's handwriting, age 54.



I'm weak, I'm spineless. I'm slimy because I have no backbone..." The disgust with herself was overwhelming.

Florence then seemed to lose all energy. She spoke in whispers, lay in bed and did very little. One Thursday she got up and cleaned every closet in her home. Friday she insisted on having her favorite grandchild over for the day. Saturday morning Florence saw her psychiatrist and made another appointment for the next week. Saturday evening she mailed a beautiful "fun" note to her grandchild (Figure 6). Sunday morning her husband worked until noon, and when he came home, he found Florence dead.

She must have written her suicide note (Figure 7) Sunday morning. Florence took no chances. She turned on the gas range, took an overdose of pills, and stabbed herself.

After the funeral, her friends expressed surprise. "Florence was the Rock of Gibraltar." "I never saw Florence when she wasn't smiling." Even those who knew her sister was difficult never realized what a corrosive relationship they had.

Sophie did not go to the funeral. She moved out of the community the same week. Eighteen years later she killed herself too. Still later, Sophie's oldest child, a son, also committed suicide.

The handwriting in Florence's suicide note, as well as in the one to her granddaughter, is expansive and spontaneous, far more released than nine years earlier. Although terminal strokes still frequently curl back to the left, there are fewer breaks and corrections, but the lower-zone lengths are greatly exaggerated.

The dramatic uphill alignment of this suicide note is euphoric. Florence seems empowered with confidence. She freely gives full rein to her impulses, even if her thinking is distorted by her emotional intensity. Her writing is no longer soft and hesitant. Suicide is her escape, and she seems excited and relieved by her decision.

Florence's handwriting dynamics at ages 45 and 54 are plotted on the Anthony/Roman Graphological Psychogram (Figure 8). Forty graphic elements are divided among eight psychological categories and ranked on a ten-point scale. The expansiveness of the graph of the suicide note is significantly greater than the graph of Florence's handwriting at age 45. This is most evident in the sectors related to goal direction and ego strength, and energy and drives. The functional productivity and form level scores are also higher for the suicide note, indicating Florence's increased ability to express herself and accomplish her objective, as tragic as it was.

Figure 9 is a drawing by Florence, done for a grandchild. It is poignantly symbolic of Florence's inner world. The birds' down-turned beaks appear unhappy. The mother bird looks back at the baby as it holds and controls the worm high above its head, just as Sophie had control over what she gave Florence, over the love she meted out to her. Both mother and baby bird float in the sky without anything to stand on, just as neither sister had a secure environment to depend on after their mother's suicide.

The positioning of the little bird looking up shows its dependency on the big-



Dearest Debby

Where do  
you think your  
Grandpa were  
On the Plane

Beach

Love and Kisses  
to all of you from  
Grandma Flo.

Figure 6: Florence's note to granddaughter, age 54. (Original reduced to 90%)



miserly and then remaining mised,  
probably.

A sweeter, kinder more generous  
- was kind enough to give me. It's  
unfortunate that I let myself be  
diverted from enjoying everything he  
was kind enough to give me.

Lovelier children than I have  
never existed. It is cruel to do this  
thing to them, but as I said before,  
a prolonged misery would be much worse.

I hope you'll divide the material  
things I left and feel you have a little  
part of the old me.

Please don't grieve for I've lived to  
see my children all well settled with  
their mates, thank God, and the 'Jabst  
needs me, my usefulness is over. I love you

Figure 7a: Florence's suicide note, age 54, reduced. (Original reduced to 75%)



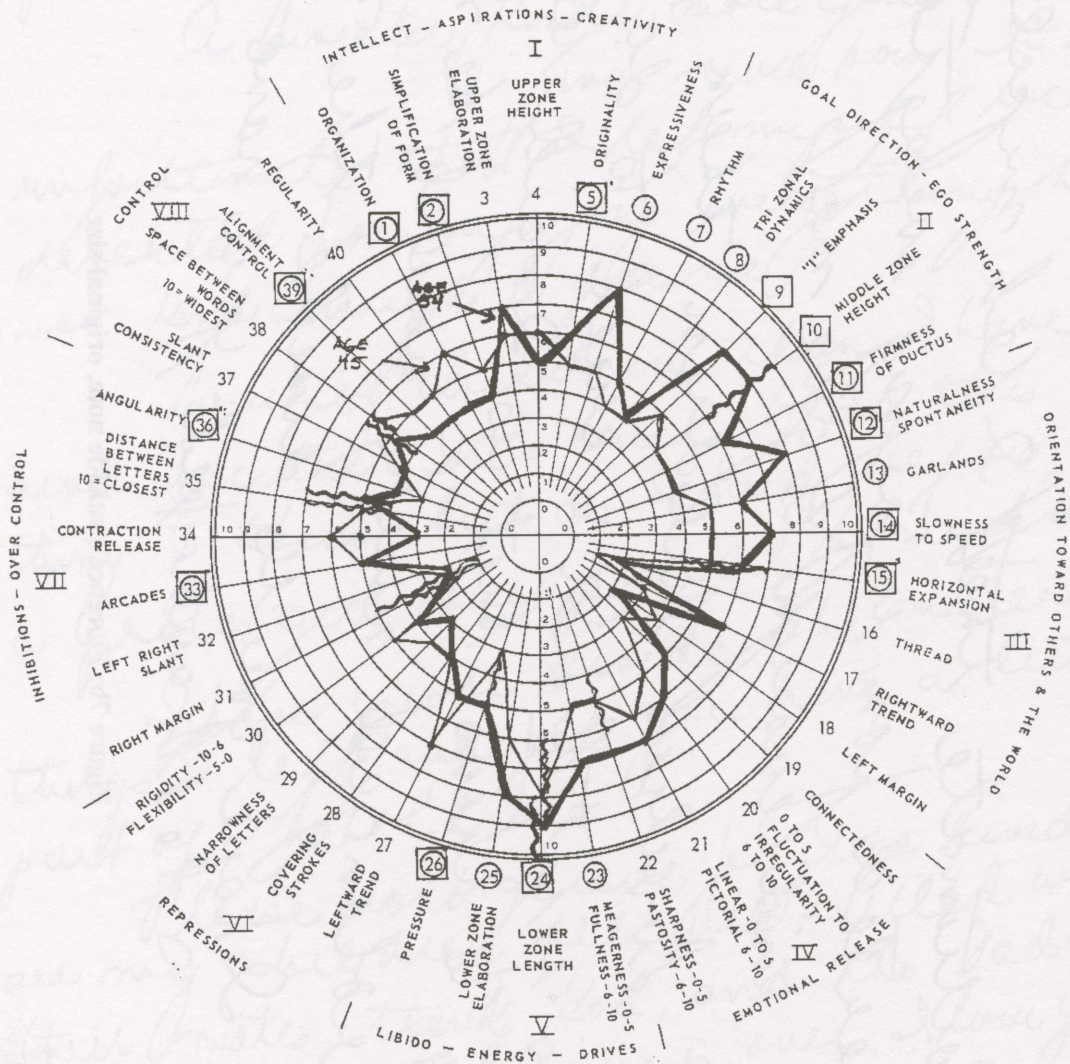
unfortunate that I let myself be  
 diverted from enjoying everything -  
 was kind enough to give me  
 loved children than I have  
 never wanted. It is cruel to do this  
 thing to them, but as I said before  
 a prolonged misery would be much  
 I hope you'll divide the note a li  
 O No 1st and keep you have a li

Figure 7b: Florence's suicide note, original size.



### GRAPHOLOGICAL PSYCHOGRAM

45yr = 67 FORM LEVEL SCORE 45yr = 63  
54yr = 86 SUICIDE NOTE 54yr = 79



~~~~~ RANGE INCONSISTENT

**Figure 8: Psychogram comparison of Florence, ages 45 and 54**



ger bird, just as Florence depended on Sophie with the attachment of a little girl for her surrogate mother. Florence could not help that dependency nor break away from it. Yet, that little bird is symbolically isolated from the mother, not only by physical space, but by the lines which strike out from the back of the mother and by the positioning of the little bird relative to the mother. It is not hard to imagine Florence's helplessness in what appears to be an unconscious expression of her relationship with Sophie.

In the rhyme, at the end of the first line, an oversized left-slanted "e" appears capitalized, projecting an increased effort to be heard and to make an impression. On the second line, in the last word "door," the "o"s are missing, and the rhyme ends with

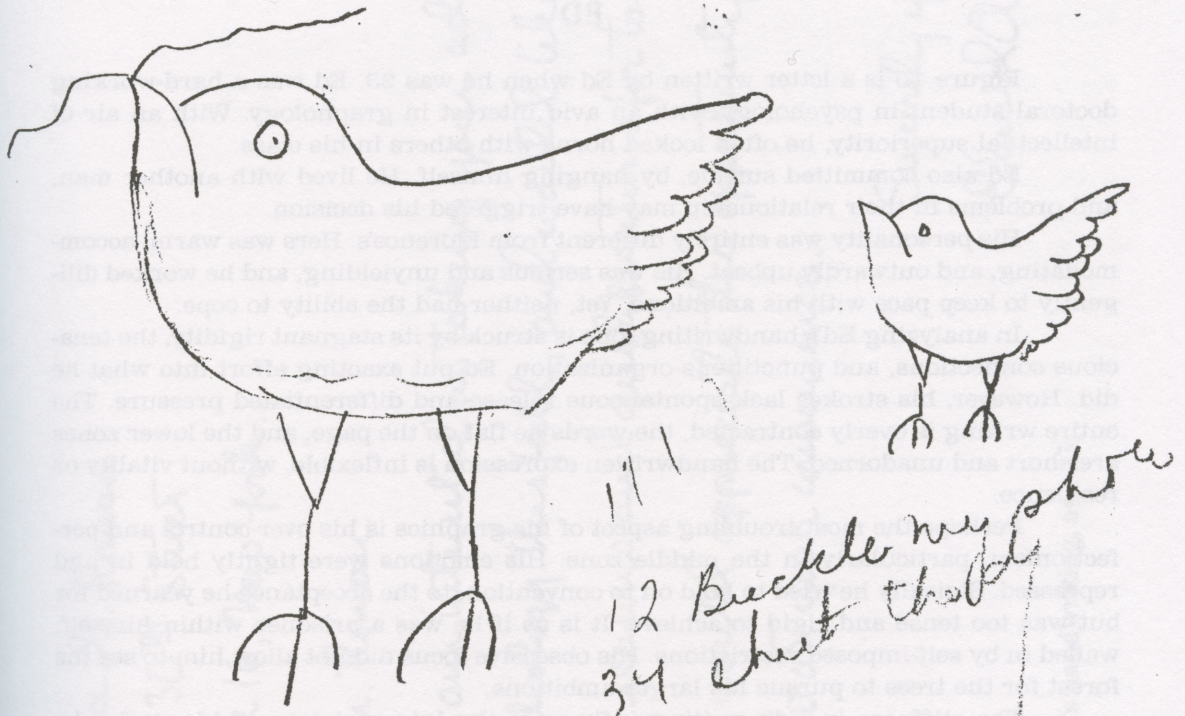


Figure 9: Florence's drawing, age unknown.



an exceptionally long, falling movement to the bottom of the page, another distortion of the lower zone. There is a loss of energy and a lack of completion reflected in that downward impetus, but the continuity, duration, and sharp-pointed release of the stroke also have an air of defiance. Florence struggled to fight off her despair. The life force within her strived for expression, yet eventually gave in to resentment.

Sophie and Florence's symbiotic attachment had its destructive roots in the suicide of their mother or perhaps before. Their compensating adjustments, or maladjustments, to their loss were influenced not only by their individual temperaments but also by the different stages of their development at the time. And Sophie's abusive control of her sister, stemming from her own needs, created a life-long dependency in Florence, depicted unwittingly in that sad little bird.

## ED

Figure 10 is a letter written by Ed when he was 23. Ed was a hard-working doctoral student in psychology with an avid interest in graphology. With an air of intellectual superiority, he often locked horns with others in his class.

Ed also committed suicide, by hanging himself. He lived with another man, and problems in their relationship may have triggered his decision.

His personality was entirely different from Florence's. Hers was warm, accommodating, and outwardly upbeat. His was serious and unyielding, and he worked diligently to keep pace with his ambitions. Yet, neither had the ability to cope.

In analyzing Ed's handwriting, one is struck by its stagnant rigidity, the tenacious connections, and punctilious organization. Ed put exacting effort into what he did. However, his strokes lack spontaneous release and differentiated pressure. The entire writing is overly contracted, the words lie flat on the page, and the lower zones are short and unadorned. The handwritten expression is inflexible, without vitality or resilience.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of his graphics is his over-control and perfectionism, particularly in the middle zone. His emotions were tightly held in and repressed. Stoically he tried to hold on to convention, to the acceptance he yearned for but was too tense and rigid to achieve. It is as if he was a prisoner within himself, walled in by self-imposed restrictions. His obsessive focus did not allow him to see the forest for the trees to pursue his larger ambitions.

The stiffness in Ed's writing influences the interpretation of his garlands, which are not sensitively executed, nor soft and yielding. Here the formal presentation and the guarded retracing of letters are symbolic of Ed's deliberate behavior. The self-consciousness of the handwriting, combined in part with the wide right margin and the frequent tremor in the upper zone, all point to underlying insecurities, anxiety, and a stifling of natural impulses.



Dr. Clarence S. Roman  
27 East 30<sup>TH</sup> Street  
New York 16, New York.

Dear Dr. Roman:

I am interested in taking your advanced workshop in epigraphy this fall, and would like to discuss with you my reasons and qualifications for taking the course.

I would appreciate the opportunity for a personal interview at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

Edward A. Cole

Figure 10: Ed's handwriting, age 23.



## MARA

Figure 11 is a note written by Mara at age 22, just two months before she committed suicide. Mara was known as a fine actress and a hard worker. Everyone thought she was going places. She was said to be full of life and energy — sweet, loving, and warm. She might lose her temper, but her friends thought of it as part of her artistic temperament.

Mara came from a cultured background. Her friend described her as “not the typical American girl.” “She had a Continental air, and there was a certain innocence about her.” She once said she didn’t want to live one moment after her body wasn’t young. She also cried and was hysterical for a very long time after the breakup of an affair. Little is known about her family life, except that her parents were about to get divorced, and that she had attempted suicide before. In her last successful attempt, she took an overdose of pills and then put on the gas.

Mara’s handwriting, characterized by rounded forms and large loops, is very feminine. Flourishes give the impression of substance, but the lightly applied pressure and feathery stroke quality are labile, without tension, indicating a lack of backbone and solidity. Elaborated capitals reveal imagination and indulgence in fantasy, but the writing quality shows insufficient toughness and discipline. Her fantasies spur her creativity but also distract her focus from what is real and concrete. The exaggerated forms reflect her excitability, her manner of compensating, and her need for attention, but the dreams and aspirations are not bolstered by willpower and self-esteem.

Mara’s movements turn inward, protecting and defending her ego. The letters are so tight, so close together, that they touch and even overlap as she retreats into herself. In contrast, the words are wide apart, revealing her isolation. She projects flair and tries to be confident, but she is actually anxious and self involved. The predominant left trends of the awkwardly cramped letters in the writing overall alert us to the fears and helplessness that envelop her.

## CONCLUSION

No one knows why people kill themselves. Suicide is not a disease but a symptom, and it is a problem that cuts across many diagnoses. According to psychologist Pamela Cantor, “Some [suicide victims] are mentally ill, most are not. Some are psychotic, most are not. Some are impulsive, most are not.” Seventy percent of all suicides, however, are in some way associated with depression.

As George Colt explains, “While it is often said that suicide may be committed by twelve different people for twelve different reasons, it may be just as true to say that one person may choose death for twelve different reasons or for one hundred different reasons — biological, sociological, and psychological factors that finally tighten around one place and time like a knot.”



Psychiatrists Leonard Moss and Donald Hamilton identified the "death trend" in families. They concluded that the inability to come to terms with a parent's death in childhood leads to an inability to cope with later loss, particularly with parental loss by suicide. Those who have a suicide in their family are eight times more likely to commit suicide themselves.

Epidemiologist Eva Deykin found that physical or sexual abuse is frequently associated with attempted suicide. Violence is a learned response to frustration and anger. That aggressiveness is turned inward as a means of coping. "Children who have been abused have very low self-esteem, a characteristic which has been identified as a central factor in suicide attempts."

# DON'T FORGET

Dear Alex,

I hope that you will  
see all sorts of good  
things in this to tell me  
about.

I thank you very much.

Mara Li

Figure 11: Mara's handwriting, age 21.



Certain forms of depression may have a genetic base. Recent research has found a genetic marker for manic-depression. Also, low levels of the brain chemical serotonin, linked to increased aggressiveness, can be traced to suicides.

Florence's, Ed's and Mara's handwritings were all written with lighter than average pressure, much lighter for Mara. This light pressure is one clue to their limited vitality for resisting and overcoming difficulty. Still, each of the three victims, four including Sophie, experienced a different face of suffering, and each compensated with very different behavior. Most of the time, they did not appear despondent in their everyday lives. They were active and productive, but they got absorbed in their despair and could not see beyond their anguish. Their handwritings appear very different and reflect their complicated individual dynamics. Each of their handwritings provide us with a better understanding of the authors' troubled lives, while giving us a clearer perspective on self-directed anger, poor self-esteem, and the resilience needed for coping.

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**BIOGRAPHY:** Patricia Siegel is a handwriting analyst and identification expert, currently President of The American Society of Professional Graphologists. Ms. Siegel co-directed an accredited handwriting analysis program at The New School for Social Research for seventeen years, where she previously received her training and certification in the psychology of handwriting and handwriting identification under Daniel and Florence Anthony. She continues to teach privately. Her publications include chapters in *Experiencing Graphology* and *Graphology Across Cultures*, and articles in the *Journal of the American Society of Professional Graphologists*, the *Journal of the British Academy of Graphology*, *La Graphologie*, and as a co-author in *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America*. Ms. Siegel is Board Certified, Diplomat status, by the American Board of Forensic Examiners, received her B.S. degree from Cornell University, and has an M.A. degree in industrial and organizational psychology from New York University.